

Colonial landscape architecture

Tanner, H. & Stringer, R. 'Converting the Wilderness: The Art of Gardening in Colonial Australia', 1979, Australian Gallery Directors Council.

There has been, in the past 20 years, a quickening of interest in historic gardens, their design, their plant content and their conservation in Europe, North America and Australia. The Garden History Society, formed in 1965, is one of the driving forces in Europe together with the practical experience accumulated, and enthusiasm demonstrated by the British National Trust. In Australia the publication of Howard Tanner and Jane Begg's 'The Great Gardens of Australia' (1976) complemented Beatrice Bligh's 'Cherish The Earth; The Story of Gardening in Australia' (1973) and both may be taken as an overdue token of increasing national awareness of historic and heritage gardens.

The National Heritage Commission of Australia has, in the past two years, provided funds to State National Trusts in order that surveys of historic gardens may be carried out, the data being included in the National Estate inventory. In 1979 at a meeting convened by the Heritage Commission, held in Launceston, Tasmania, representatives of these survey teams agreed to investigate the foundation of an Australian Garden History Society.

The Australian Gallery Directors Council have showed vision in deciding to mount a travelling exhibition on colonial gardens and is to be applauded. The well produced catalogue to this exhibition comprises, in its own right, a useful text on colonial Australian gardens. The Guest Curator of the exhibition and author of the *Catalogue*, is Howard Tanner who is referred to above, and is an architect based in Sydney. The photographic illustrations are largely those of Richard Stringer, who is Guest Photographer to the exhibition.

After a preface by the Chairman of the Heritage Council of New South Wales, R.M. Hope, and a short introduction by Brett Rogers, Exhibitions Co-ordinator of the Australian Gallery Directors Council, the text of the *Catalogue* is arranged under the headings, "The first gardens", "Gardens for propagation and scientific purposes", "Arcadian landscapes", "The picturesque landscape", "Gardens of the Victorian Era", and "Private nurseries and horticultural handbooks". These headings, together with the titles listed in "References" and "Selected bibliography", bear witness to the main weakness of the *Catalogue*, which is an undue emphasis on landscape architecture at the expense of plants. There is only a sporadic and passing mention of commoner garden plants, including "*Victoria regia*", p. 19, which has long been more correctly *Victoria amazonica*, and but passing mention of the reciprocal sea trade between Australia and Europe which on the one hand did much to determine (even today) the range of exotics grown here, and on the other stimulated European-based research into the cultural requirements and botany of Australian native plants to the extent that George Bentham was able to write the only "Flora" of Australia, still to be superceded; yet he never visited the country! Colonial gardens were basically gardens in which exotic plants were grown and species and cultivar lists, however brief, would have been helpful in this *Catalogue*.

Tanner's writing will have lasting significance for Australian garden history as a subject, and it is to be hoped that his projected full history of gardening in Australia will contain more adequate and informed treatment of plants *per se*, and also be more comprehensive in its geographical coverage. The present *Catalogue* reflects Tanner's researches in being better documented in New South Wales, Victoria, and perhaps Tasmania, than other states. While it is probably true that these eastern states hold the most significant part of Australia's garden heritage, the erroneous information on, for example, Adelaide Botanic Garden was avoidable.

As an example of the 'gardenesque' style, Adelaide Botanic Garden in Schomburgk's era was remarkable and contrary to the *Catalogue* statement, p. 19, perfectly good photographic prints in the Archives of that institution show what the Garden looked like in the 1870's. On the same page, James Shaw's painting dated 1865, for all its historical interest, hardly shows the extent of "Schomburgk's endeavour" as Schomburgk was only appointed in that year!

Similarly no mention is made of the not unattractive glasshouses at Adelaide prior to the erection of the still extant Tropical House, the date of opening of which is in error, 1877 not 1874. The Adelaide Victoria House was opened in 1868 not 1860, and the Museum of Economic Botany with its memorable stencilled ceiling in 1881 not 1880. The year of establishment of the Adelaide Botanic Garden was 1855, as stated on p. 19, not 1862 as stated on p. 24.

On p. 29 *Melia azedarach* var. *australasica*, not "*australiasia*" as stated, was not the only deciduous tree in Australia even excluding monsoonal species: a few others include *Nothofagus gunnii* from Tasmania. On the same page *Macleaya* is not a variety of *Bocconia*: both are accepted as different genera in the Papaveraceae, although *B. cordata* is a nomenclatural synonym for *M. cordata*.

William Robinson, p. 62, was not born in England, but in Ireland where his first job was as garden-boy to the Vicar of Stradbally, Sir Hunt-Jackson Walsh. England was where Robinson made his fortune and became famous together with Gertrude Jekyll, for advocacy of the well orchestrated wild-garden and herbaceous border. No mention is made of Robinson's "The English Flower Garden" (1883) which I suspect influenced Australian pleasure gardens at the turn of the century, as had the Loudons earlier in the nineteenth century. Robinsonian garden elements are still evident today.

Tanner, H. & Stringer, R. 1979. 'Converting the Wilderness: The Art of Gardening in Colonial Australia', pp. 95, monochrome endpapers, coloured cover, 12 coloured plates, 138 monochrome illustrations. (Australian Gallery Directors Council, Sydney.) Paper-bound \$4.00 (available from exhibitions in Brisbane, October 1979: Ballarat, November-December 1979: Sydney, January 1980: Melbourne, February 1980: Launceston, March 1980: Hobart, April-May 1980: Adelaide, June 1980 or A.G.D.C., P.O. Box 369, Royal Exchange, Sydney, 2000).

Brian Morley
Botanic Gardens, Adelaide.

Australian native plants

Wrigley, J.W. & Fagg, M., 'Australian Native Plants', 1979, Collins.

During the past few years a number of books have appeared concerning the cultivation and propagation of Australian plants. These have ranged from a quasi-ecological approach to the more empirical listing of species and evidence concerning their requirements under cultivation.

A bench mark has now been established by the appearance of the long awaited volume by John Wrigley entitled 'Australian Native Plants'. His writings have been supported by a magnificent series of coloured plates by Murray Fagg. Over 2500 species are described together with more than 140 colour photos and 300 black and white plates and line drawings.